

AMELIA EARHART



Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic and also the first to solo it alone. She was the first flyer to solo between Hawaii and the American mainland. In 1937 she attempted to fly completely around the world. On the longest over-water leg, from New Guinea to Howland Island, her plane disappeared without a trace. With her when the plane vanished was her navigator Fred Noonan. The result was one of the most intriguing search stories ever. Amelia Earhart's brief flying career had lasted only nine years but her many accomplishments, including being the first woman ever awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, stand as an inspiration to other women. Her career as an aviatrix began shortly after she dropped out of Columbia University to earn money for flying lessons. She always encouraged women to fly and became the aviation editor of *Cosmopolitan* as well as being one of the founders of Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots. The mystery surrounding her strange disappearance has become almost as well remembered as her accomplishments.

In 1966 Fred Goerner, a newsman for station KCBS in San Francisco, became extremely interested in the Earhart case and launched into a most intensive search for the truth about her disappearance. Her story began as a result of an interview with a former Japanese named Josephine Akiyama, who claimed to have been an eye witness to Amelia's capture by the Japanese on the island of Saipan in 1937. His remarkable story, called *The Search for Amelia Earhart*, spanned six long years of research and included four expeditions to the Western Pacific Marianas and Marshall islands. Goerner interviewed everyone he could find who was even remotely connected with the case, and he spent hours and hours pouring over government files and the testimony of State Department witnesses. His conclusion was that Amelia Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan, had diverted their main course of announced travel to investigate unofficially Japanese warfields to Truk in the Central Caroline Chain of Islands. He theorized that they probably encountered bad weather and fuel shortage problems. They then force landed the plane on an island owned by the Japanese, were captured, and later executed. While his story is based on his extensive research, other theories of her demise still exist.

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For Thinking and Discussing

1. What message did Amelia Earhart have for women interested in flying?

2. How are accomplishments like those of Amelia Earhart important to a society such as ours?

3. What was Amelia Earhart's goal when she was last seen?

4. If Goerner's conclusion is correct about what really happened to Amelia Earhart, how does this change her place in history?

